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QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[28 February 1997]

1. The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) wishes to express its concern at the consequences of the maintenance of states of emergency, especially as regards the human rights of detainees.

2. FIDH and its Syrian affiliate, the Organization of Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria (the CDFs), wish once again to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the disastrous impact on respect for human rights of the maintenance in force for over 34 years of a state of emergency in the Syrian Arab Republic: 34 years of its history torn from what remains of a society in anguish.

3. We deplore the continued detention of Mr. Mustafa Falah and Mr. Khalil Brayez. These men have been incarcerated for 27 years now, whereas they were originally sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment! We once again ask the President of Syria to intervene to stop this tragedy and bring an end to the shameful practice of long-term arbitrary detention in Syria.

4. Despite demands from the international human rights community, five CDF activists are beginning their fifth year of detention. They were convicted, at the end of a grossly unfair trial by a court of special jurisdiction, merely for doing their jobs as human rights defenders. The individuals in question are Mr. Aktham Nouaisseh, Mr. Nizar Nayouf, Mr. Afif Mizher, Mr. Muhammed Ali Habib and Mr. Bassam al-Sheikh. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found their detention to be arbitrary and they have been adopted by over 107 NGOs. Over 40 NGOs now consider the date of their conviction, 17 March, as an international day for human rights defenders. Our colleagues Jadi'Nawal, Ya'qoub Musa, Hassan Ali, Hussam Salama and Thabet Murad were released a few days after completing their five-year prison term. We welcome their release.

5. One hundred or so prisoners have been arrested since the fifty-second session of the Commission on Human Rights, including pro-Iraqi Baathists and Kurds. At the same time, prisoners' liberation movements have been brought to a stop. This raises the number of prisoners of opinion in the country to nearly 2,800.

6. As regards prison conditions, FIDH and the CDFs are in possession of information attesting to practices which are at variance with the minimum guarantees to which detainees are entitled. The death of Mr. Karim al-Haj Hussein 23 hours after his release, and that of journalist Rida Haddad following 8 months of suffering after 15 years in detention, are eloquent examples. Our organizations therefore demand the immediate release of all sick detainees in Syrian prisons. FIDH and the CDFs are particularly concerned about the state of health of Riad al-Turk, Aktham Nouaisseh, Ahmad Hassan Mansour, Safwan Akkash, Mustafa Hussein, Faraj Biraqdar, Wajih Ghanem, Issa Mahmoud, Abbas Abbas, Mounif Mulhem, Nizar Mradni, Nabil Fawwaz, Samir al-Hassan, Nu'man Abdo and Muhamed kheir Khalaf.

7. FIDH and the CDFs are concerned at the way in which prisoners of opinion are tried before the State Security Court. These unfair trials involve more than 500 persons. More than 23 persons who have completed their sentences are still being held. Among them are Munif Mulhem and Yasin al-Haj Saleh, both of whom are ill.

8. Our organizations deplore the brutal interrogation, over the past 10 months, of more than 180 democrats, members of or close to the National Unionist Democratic Party.

9. The CDFs vigorously condemn the terrorist acts committed in the country in May 1996 by the Turkish military security services, as well as the cowardly attack in December. They wish to express their solidarity with the victims' families. It is unacceptable to choose blind violence as a means of communication between two neighbouring States.

10. FIDH and the CDFs call on the Commission to support their demand for the immediate and unconditional release of about 2,800 prisoners of opinion - Syrians, Palestinians, Jordanians and Lebanese - languishing in Syrian prisons, the abolition of the special courts and implementation of the guarantees of the right to a fair trial. They also renew their call for an end to the practice of torture and for the punishment of those who engage in torture.